

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A plate system for immobilizing adjacent vertebral bodies or stabilizing an interbody
device, comprising:

 a plate having at least one spaced opening therein, said at least one opening
having an upper section with a pre-selected width w_1 for receiving the head section
5 of a cervical screw and a lower section having a width less than w_1 and defining at
least a partial helical track through which the threaded end of the screw may be
threaded; and

 a bone screw having a cylindrical head section of diameter d_1 , an intermediate
neck section of a diameter d_2 and a depending thread section of a diameter d_3 , the
10 threaded section having a pitch matching the pitch of the at least partial helical track
in the plate, where $d_3 < d_1$, the threaded section of the screw being arranged so that
once the screw is threaded completely into the plate opening the screw may be
rotated relative to the plate without causing any axial movement between the screw
and the plate.

1 2. The invention of claim 1 wherein said at least one opening comprises a plurality of
openings and wherein the openings overly the vertebral bodies to be immobilized.

1 3. The invention of claim 2 where $d_1 \cong w_1$ to substantially prevent the screw from pivoting
relative to the plate when threaded completely into the plate opening.

1 4. The invention of claim 2 where $d_1 < w_1$ to allow the screw to pivot relative to the plate
when threaded completely into the plate opening.

1 5. The invention of claim 3 wherein at least one of the plate openings is generally cylindrical with w_1 equal to the diameter of the upper section of the opening and the lower section defining a complete helical thread.

1 6. The invention of claim 4 wherein at least one of the plate openings is generally cylindrical with w_1 equal to the diameter of the upper section of the opening and the lower section defining a complete helical thread.

1 7. The invention of claim 3 wherein at least one of the plate openings is in the form of a rectangular slot terminating at least at one end in a semicircular portion containing the partially threaded section.

1 8. The invention of claim 4 wherein at least one of the plate openings is in the form of a rectangular slot terminating at least at one end in a semicircular portion containing the partially threaded section.

1 9. The invention of claim 3 wherein at least one of the plate openings is in the form of a rectangular slot containing at least one partially thread section therein.

1 10. The invention of claim 4 wherein at least one of the plate openings is in the form of a rectangular slot containing at least one partially thread section therein.

1 11. The invention of claim 5 wherein the slot and screw are arranged so that the screw can traverse along the slot once threaded into the opening.

1 12. The invention of claim 6 wherein the slot and screw are arranged so that the screw can traverse along the slot once threaded into the opening.

1 13. The invention of claim 1 wherein the helical thread is defined by a ring removably insertable into the lower section of the opening.

1 14. The invention of claim 1 wherein the entry and exit portions of the at least partial helical
thread are in the form of an upper and lower chamfer, respectively, and wherein the screw has upper
and a lower chamfer portions joining the neck to the cylindrical head and to the depending threaded
portions, respectively, and the upper chamfer portion of the opening and the screw being
5 complementary and the lower chamfer portions of the opening and the screw being complementary.

1 15. The invention of claim 1 where the head section of the screw is movable along the neck
of the screw so that it may axially compress the plate against an underlying vertebrae and rigidly
fix its location.

1 16. The invention of claim 1 wherein at least one opening in the plate includes a screw
receiving ring forming the lower section thereof.

1 17. A cervical plate system for immobilizing adjacent vertebral bodies comprising:

 a bone screw having a cylindrical head section of a first diameter d_1 , an
intermediate cylindrical neck section of a second diameter d_2 , and a depending
threaded section having a given pitch, the threads having an outside diameter of d_3 ,
5 where d_2 is less than d_1 or d_3 , the screw having an upper chamfer portion joining the
cylindrical head section to the neck section and a lower chamfer portion joining the
neck section to the depending threaded section;

 a plate having at least two spaced openings therein for overlying vertebral
bodies to be immobilized, each opening having an upper portion for receiving the
10 head section of the screw and a lower portion defining at least a partial helical thread
having the same pitch as the screw thread with entry and exit portions which have
chamfers complementary to the upper and lower chamfer portions of the screw, the

threads on the screw being arranged to extend below the exit portion of the at least partial helical thread in the plate opening whereby once the screw is threaded completely into the plate opening the screw may be rotated relative to the plate without causing axial movement between the screw and plate.

18. The invention of claim 17 wherein at least one of the openings is in the form of a slot with semicircular ends and an intermediate generally straight section, the chamfers and the at least partial helical thread being formed on one of the semicircular ends.

19. The invention of claim 18 wherein at least one of the openings in the plate is generally cylindrical, the chamfers in the opening and at least the partial helical thread being formed by a ring inserted into the lower portion of the opening.

20. The invention of claim 19 wherein the upper portion of the plate opening has a diameter slightly greater than d_1 to substantially prevent any pivoting action of the screw within the opening once the screw has been completely inserted into the plate.

21. The invention of claim 19 wherein the upper portion of the plate opening has a diameter sufficiently less than d_1 to allow the screw to pivot within the opening once the screw has been completely inserted into the plate.

22. The invention of claim 19 where the head section of the screw is movable along the neck of the screw so that it may axially compress the plate, rigidly fixing its location.

23. A plate system for immobilizing adjacent vertebral bodies comprising:

a bone screw having a cylindrical head section of a first diameter d_1 , an intermediate cylindrical neck section of a second diameter d_2 , and a depending threaded section having a given pitch, the threads having an outside diameter of d_3 ,

5 where d_2 is less than d_1 or d_3 ;

 a plate having at least one spaced opening therein for overlying at least one
vertebral bodies and/or interbody device to be immobilized, each opening having an
upper section for receiving the head section of the screw and a lower section defining
at least a partial helical thread having the same pitch as the screw thread with entry
10 and exit portions, the threads on the screw being arranged to extend below the exit
portion of the at least partial helical thread in the plate opening whereby once the
screw is threaded completely into the plate opening the screw may be rotated relative
to the plate without causing axial movement between the screw and plate.

1 24. The invention of claim 23 wherein the at least partial helical thread comprises a complete
helical thread formed by a ring positioned within the bottom section of said at least one of the
openings.

1 25. The invention of claim 24 wherein said at least one opening is in the form of a slot with
the slot being arranged to allow the ring and screw to move transversely along the slot.

1 26. The invention of claim 24 wherein said at least one opening is circular, the lower section
of said opening defining an anti-rotation cavity and the ring defining an anti-rotation tab which
projects within the cavity to prevent the ring from rotating within the opening.

1 27. A method of installing a ring defining an internal thread for cooperation with a threaded
cervical screw into the lower section within a circular opening of a cervical plate defining a plane,
the ring having opposed outwardly projecting anti-rotational tabs and the lower section of the plate
opening defining inwardly extending anti-rotation cavities, comprising:

5 positioning the ring within the lower section of the plate opening so that the

tabs are within the cavities and the ring is oriented at about 90° with respect to the plane of the plate; and

rotating the plate through the 90° angle so that it is parallel to the plane of the plate while pressing the plate into the lower section of the opening.

1 28. A method of installing a ring defining an internal thread for cooperation with a threaded cervical screw into the lower section within a circular opening of a cervical plate defining a plane, the ring having opposed inwardly extending anti-rotation cavities and the lower section of the plate opening defining outwardly projecting anti-rotational tabs, comprising:

5 positioning the ring within the lower section of the plate opening so that the tabs are within the cavities and the ring is oriented at about 90° with respect to the plane of the plate; and

rotating the plate through the 90° angle so that it is parallel to the plane of the plate while pressing the plate into the lower section of the opening.